

Testimony from Joy Eakins

March 11, 2015

My name is Joy Eakins. I am a small business owner in Kansas and I am a member of the USD 259 Wichita School Board, though I present this testimony as a citizen.

I gave testimony regarding SB 171 in the Senate committee, and I appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony in the House. Voting is an important right for our citizens, and engaging citizens in the process of selecting local leaders is key.

I support moving local elections to November for the following reasons:

- a) I have lived in 3 states – this is the only one where school board elections are held in April.
- b) In my election, less than 8000 people voted, and the election was decided by 46 votes. In the current culture, citizens expect elections to be in November. I believe the low turnout was at least partly because in November the state had just gone through a national campaign for the presidency and people were checked out.
- c) **While research shows that moving elections to November of odd years would increase voter turnout by 8.7% that same research indicates that moving elections to even years would increase voter turnout as much as 18.5 percentage points.**¹
- d) I have included links with research from the Thomas Fordham Institute on School Board Leadership². This research found that “merely holding elections at the same time as state or national-level elections is associated with a student proficiency rate about 2.4 points higher than a comparable district that has off-cycle elections.”³
- e) When I took office in July, within the first 6 weeks we were asked to approve a budget of \$639M, vote on the Superintendent’s contract and vote on employee contracts. These are 3 very serious issues a board faces and the work to put those together happens between February and June. Taking office in January makes sense.

There is one piece of this bill that I **adamantly oppose**. I cannot support allowing an election commissioner, who has no accountability with voters or the public for the education of students, be allowed to take a school for education. **I have heard some argue that these are taxpayer buildings and should be available for use. My reply is that they are available for use – they are being used as they were purposed by taxpayers to educate our children.** I realize there may be a few counties with issues that need to be worked out, but **creating a law for all to solve a situation that applies to a few is not the right answer.** I urge you to remove this portion of the bill.

¹ Maciag, Mike “Voter Turnout Plummeting in Local Elections,” Governing.com, October 2014. <http://www.acweinschenk.net/uploads/1/7/3/6/17361647/weinschenk.mayorturnout.pdf> as quoted in <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-voter-turnout-municipal-elections.html> (Accessed 3/9/15)

² Shober, Arnold and Michael T. Hartney, “Does School Board Leadership Matter?” Thomas Fordham Foundation, March 2014. <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/Does-School-Board-Leadership-Matter-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed 3/9/2015)

I do not support making these races partisan and am pleased that the partisanship piece was removed. Even though I am a conservative Republican, I likely would not have run for my office if I had to know something about party politics. I had never even been to a meeting of Republicans before I ran. I ran because I care about the education of our kids, but I am not a politician. And, even if the race is nonpartisan, if a person wishes to run on a party platform, they are free to do so. Effective campaigns have been run in other states in this way.

Thank you for your time and service.

Respectfully,

Joy Eakins